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Review of the implementation of the recommendations and decisions adopted by the General Assembly at its tenth special session

Work of the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report informs the General Assembly of the substantive discussions that were held during the sole meeting in 2007 of the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters from 16 to 18 July.

Among its recommendations, the Board encouraged the Secretary-General, as one way to advance the disarmament and non-proliferation agenda, to continue his efforts to raise awareness of these issues among Governments, the media, civil society, academia and the general public. Recognizing the importance of efforts at the regional level to advance the disarmament agenda, members suggested that the United Nations strengthen its cooperation with regional organizations.

The Board began a discussion on the challenges to international security raised by newly emerging weapons technologies, especially those related to outer space issues. It suggested that a high-level panel be created to take up the issue of outer space in all its aspects. In connection with scientific advancement in the area of biotechnology, the Board suggested that meetings of experts, scientists, industry representatives, Government officials and representatives of civil society be convened at all levels to discuss the impact of advances in that area on arms control and disarmament.

The present report also contains a review of the work of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, over which the Board has oversight. The Board recommends continuing the subvention to the Institute from the regular budget as a guarantor of the independence of the Institute in conducting its disarmament research.

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I. Introduction

1. The Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters met only once in 2007, holding its forty-eighth session in New York from 16 to 18 July. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 38/183 O. The report on the work of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), approved by the Board in its capacity as the Institute's Board of Trustees, has been issued separately (see A/62/152).

2. Ho-Jin Lee of the Republic of Korea chaired the session of the Board in 2007. The Board received a comprehensive *tour d'horizon* from the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs on the latest global and regional developments, including United Nations systemwide activities in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation.

3. The present report summarizes the Board's deliberations and the specific recommendations it conveyed to the Secretary-General.

II. Substantive discussions and recommendations

A. Review of ways to advance the disarmament agenda

4. The Board exchanged views on ways to advance the disarmament agenda, using as a basis for its discussions annex II to the letter dated 15 February 2007 from the Secretary-General to the President of the General Assembly (see A/61/749), in which the Secretary-General stressed that general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control remained a central issue on the global agenda. The Board discussed ways in which the Secretary-General could revitalize the disarmament and non-proliferation agenda.

5. Three Board members, Christiane Agboton Johnson, Carolina Hernandez and Adam Rotfeld presented "food-for-thought" papers on the item.

6. There was consensus among the Board members that one significant way in which the Secretary-General could advance the disarmament agenda was to continue to raise public awareness, in particular given the fact that the general public did not seem to place a high priority on global disarmament issues. Apart from efforts to raise public awareness, many Board members also emphasized the need to raise the awareness of the media and of those individuals directly involved in policymaking.

7. In that connection, several members stressed the importance of a personal role by the Secretary-General in generating the political will of national leaders in the major areas of disarmament and non-proliferation, including highlighting important issues.

8. Another means of advancing the disarmament agenda that received wide support from the Board members was to enhance regional approaches as a contribution to global disarmament efforts. It was suggested that a region-specific approach could be a more pragmatic way to create greater political impetus and bring better prospects of success in global disarmament efforts. An illustration of such an approach was the current progress, albeit slow and demanding, being made at the six-party talks towards denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. Some Board

members suggested that a similar approach could be applied in seeking solutions to the situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran, while recalling that current proliferation crises were a threat to international peace and security requiring action at the level of the United Nations. Furthermore, many members emphasized the need to enhance the special role of regional organizations in contributing to global disarmament efforts.

9. In that context, a discussion was held on the role of the three United Nations regional centres on disarmament, including the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa, the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific, and the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean. It was stressed that more attention and support from the global and regional communities should be provided to them in order to strengthen their role and encourage further cooperation between them and their regional/subregional counterparts.

10. During the exchange of views, some Board members reiterated that nuclear disarmament remained a priority in the area of multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation. Nonetheless, support was also expressed for the need to take practical and feasible steps to reduce nuclear dangers, such as confidence-building, de-targeting, security assurances and nuclear-weapon-free zones, and policies of non-first use.

11. Some members commented on the usefulness of having another special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, the fourth special session, and on the need to highlight this on the agenda of the Secretary-General.

12. Other noteworthy views mentioned by individual Board members during the session included the use of informal dialogues among strategic and relevant stakeholders with a view to raising public awareness; support for increased cooperation between disarmament and peacekeeping operations; the possibility of establishing a group of Government experts to study the issue of illicit transfers of explosives and their components; and the need to pay attention to the characteristics of recent intra-State conflicts, in which non-State actors play a significant role, while acknowledging the centrality of States in the field of disarmament.

13. The year 2008 will mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Board. It was suggested that the Board find a way to commemorate the occasion through a joint activity with UNIDIR. The Board could also use the occasion to hold a thorough review of its own work and ways to strengthen its role.

Recommendations

14. **The Board made the following recommendations:**

(a) **The Secretary-General should play an active role in generating the political will of all nations to reinvigorate the discussions on disarmament and non-proliferation issues, given that they are essential to international peace and security and to development;**

(b) **The Secretary-General should intensify his efforts to raise the awareness of disarmament and non-proliferation issues among the media, civil society, academia and the general public;**

(c) **With regionalism gaining importance, more efforts should be made to enhance cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations in addressing a broad array of issues related to disarmament and international security, as envisaged in Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations, while also taking into account specific regional needs;**

(d) **A pragmatic approach should be employed in resolving the current difficulties facing the disarmament and non-proliferation agenda.**

B. Emerging weapons technologies, including outer space aspects

15. The Board discussed the progress made in new weapons technologies and their impact on multilateral disarmament, non-proliferation and international security, including outer space issues.

16. The Board had before it a "food-for-thought" paper on the agenda item prepared by Michael Clarke, a member of the Board.

17. The Board also heard presentations by two experts: Christopher Chyba of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University, on the theme "Outer space weapons", and Eileen Choffnes, Director of the Forum on Microbial Threats, Institute of Medicine, on the theme "Globalization, biotechnology and the threat spectrum".

18. The need to create and promote new international norms to tackle the issue of new weapons technologies was stressed. It was also mentioned that while some technological advances such as anti-satellite weapons fell in the realm of traditional arms control methods, other emerging technologies such as those in biotechnology might not be amenable to solutions by traditional methods.

19. There was also concurrence on the importance of an information dissemination mechanism as a means to raise public awareness in the area of newly emerging weapons technologies. The Secretary-General could play an important role in that aspect.

20. The Board took note of the fact that October 2007 marked the fortieth anniversary of the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies and the fiftieth anniversary of the launch of Sputnik. Some suggestions were made that it would be an opportune moment to recall the importance of the peaceful uses of outer space.

21. Several Board members expressed concern about the possible proliferation of newly emerging weapons technologies by both States and non-State actors. Questions were posed about what efforts could be taken to prevent such proliferation, taking into account that the division between military and civilian technologies had blurred in recent years, and the inherent difficulties encountered in controlling dual-use technologies. Board members also stated that more attention should be paid to the issue of information security and that greater public awareness be generated in that regard, given the fact that an attack on information systems could impact a whole society.

22. Concerns were also expressed by some members that such new emerging technologies might possibly encourage military-capable States and non-State actors to become increasingly willing to engage in more coercive actions.

Recommendations

23. **The Board made the following recommendations:**

(a) **The Secretary-General should raise the awareness of not only the policymaking community but also the general public of the risks/threats related to emerging weapons technologies whenever possible;**

(b) **The Secretary-General should convene meetings of experts, scientists, industry representatives, Government officials and representatives of civil society at all levels to discuss the impact of biotechnological advances on arms control and disarmament;**

(c) **The Secretary-General should make consolidated efforts within the United Nations system to address the growing risks/threats to the peaceful uses of outer space. One option would be to establish a high-level panel to discuss the issue of outer space in all its aspects, preferably on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the Outer Space Treaty.**

III. Meeting with the Secretary-General

24. The Board met with the Secretary-General on 18 July 2007. Several members of the Board took the opportunity to discuss issues of major concern.

IV. Civil society/non-governmental organization presentations

25. As is customary, the Board invited representatives of non-governmental organizations for presentations and an exchange of views on the efforts of civil society to move forward the disarmament and non-proliferation agenda. The Board expressed its appreciation to Jonathan Granoff, President of the Global Security Institute and co-chair of the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Nuclear Non-proliferation, who made recommendations relating to security and law and outer space; Felicity Hill, who described the recently launched international campaign to abolish nuclear weapons and presented the updated model "Nuclear weapons convention", contained in *Securing Our Survival: the Case for a Nuclear Weapons Convention*;[1] and John Burroughs, Executive Director of the Lawyers' Committee on Nuclear Policy, which recently published *Nuclear Disorder or Cooperative Security?, United States Weapons of Terror, the Global Proliferation Crisis, and Paths to Peace*,[2] a comprehensive civil society response to the 2006 report of the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission.

V. Board of Trustees of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research

26. As the Board of Trustees for UNIDIR, the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters was first briefed by the Director of UNIDIR on the consideration by the

[1] Merav Datan and others (Cambridge, Massachusetts, International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, 2007).

[2] Lawyers' Committee on Nuclear Policy and others (2007). Available from http://WMDreport.org.

Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions of the Institute's 2006 report. The Advisory Board then proceeded to formally adopt the programme budget of UNIDIR for 2006 (see A/61/180).

27. The Board was also briefed by the Director of UNIDIR on the Institute's proposed programme of work and budget for 2007 and 2008 and its activities during the period from August 2006 to July 2007 (see A/62/152). The Director reported that the UNIDIR programme of work continued to focus on three main areas: global security and disarmament; regional security and disarmament; and human security and disarmament. The Institute was therefore able to address a wide spectrum of substantive disarmament-related issues, ranging from small arms and light weapons to weapons in outer space.

28. Board members voiced strong support for the work carried out by UNIDIR and expressed satisfaction with its activities. Some members questioned the low distribution of UNIDIR publications in Asia, Latin America and the Middle East, as compared with other regions. The Director responded that steps were being taken to address the weak distribution in those regions and that the experiences gained by significantly increasing readership in Africa could be applied to the other regions. After considering it, the Board approved the UNIDIR report for submission to the General Assembly.

29. The Board also recommended the granting of a subvention for UNIDIR from the United Nations regular budget for the biennium 2008-2009. There was general agreement that the subvention was the best guarantee of the independence of the Institute.

VI. Future work

30. The Board exchanged views on several possible topics for discussion at its sessions in 2008, including such matters as energy security, the financing of weapons transfers and improving the work of the Board.

31. Although no final decision was taken, several possible topics were suggested, including (a) possible measures to address the threat of missile proliferation; (b) ways to effectively implement Security Council resolution 1540 (2004); (c) ways and means to cope with future challenges in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation; (d) issues of energy security and environment that have an impact on disarmament and non-proliferation; and (e) scope for principles/norms regarding responsible arms transfers.

VII. Conclusions

32. The Board held a lively debate on ways to advance the disarmament and non-proliferation agenda, recognizing that the topic was an ongoing one that must be pursued urgently in the light of current threats to peace and international security. Emerging weapons technologies are having an impact on deliberations on security and defence in many countries. Developments with possible military applications are being driven by rapid civil sector advancement in science and technology. Discussion on those issues, with a special focus on ways to maintain outer space for peaceful uses, will continue in the framework of the Board.

33. The Board highlighted two historic anniversaries, both of which will fall in October 2007: the fortieth anniversary of the Outer Space Treaty and the fiftieth anniversary of the launching of the Sputnik. They represent an opportunity to reinforce the legal norm created by the Treaty and to remind the world of the international cooperation that was required to bring about the Treaty and sustain its impact over the years.

34. As a pragmatic way to commemorate its own twenty-fifth year of functioning as an advisory board for the Secretary-General, the Board will reflect on its own significance and functioning as a part of its activities in 2008.

Annex

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